

THE (OTHER)WORLDLY WOMAN : Spiritual Sirens in Literature

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要約

多面的な女：文学における二重性的なサイレン達

女性原理の暗い面は黒マドンナ（ブラック・マドンナ）あるいは黒女神（ダーク・ゴッデス）と根本的に同じと考えられているが、魔女は宗教に根があります。この宗教的な根の開花は女性同志の滅亡。歴史的小説では官女（即ち宮廷女性）の物語りの中の女性の汚す力は暗黒の月の女性原理そのものからエロチックな力が切られて、暗黒界の男性原理（つまり悪魔の精神）と腐敗した力が出て来ます。歴史的小説の女主人公の恐ろしさは政治的な力の欠乏と豊富な感情とを交えて、苦悩させた男性に対してではなく、女性ライバルに対して攻撃します。女性同志の復讐は女性原理を攻撃するから、自己嫌悪のみならず自己破壊と言う結果になると言うフェミニスト評論を修正します。

Do woman ever like one another?
Not very often, I think.

Kathleen Winsor

It is because of men that women
dislike one another.

La Bruyère

The law of mutual female betrayal is a
logical outgrowth of inculcated
self-shame.

Nina Auerbach

Exodus 22 : 18

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live among you. . . ."

King James (Authorized) Version :

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

New American Standard Version :

You shall not allow a sorceress to live.

Today's English Version :

Put to death any woman who practices magic.

New International Version :

Do not allow a sorceress to live.

The Dark Goddess is not the Black Madonna. The forces that revealed both are the same, but history places them at a long reach from each other. Attribution of Astarte to the position of pagan prototype of the Virgin Mary is only one of the myriad attributions of a face of the pre-Christian Goddess to *anno Domini* manifestations of the Madonna. The "crucial psychic role" (Galland 51) these female figures play in the human unconscious is coexistent, however. "Gilles Quispel, Historian of Religion at Utrecht University and a protégé of Jung" (Galland 50) described this role for the Black Madonna "in Jungian terms as symbolizing the earth, matter, the feminine in man, and the self in woman" (Galland 51).

Ideal and intriguing as this thesis may be, fictional illustrations of the so-called feminine dark side seem drawn from religious writ rather than from feminine roots. Since fictional manifestations of women's witchery are to be understood as drawn from the living model, the question is not so much, as both the Queen in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* and Freud in his entire practice asked "What do women want?" as "What do women do?"

What women do, according to novels as disparate as those set in 11th century Japan or 17th century England or 20th century America or Britain, is destroy each other in a violent parody of the mother-earth-nurturer images of ancient cultures. Fostering of the female Principle/being is denied; rather there is a sorcery attributed to women which is in itself not feminine, but a product of the patriarchal Inquisition that certainly did as

much harm to Columbus as it did to a witch burned at the stake—not only individual harm, but permanent harm in the form of a legacy that achieved archetypal status, that of the witch/bitch who annihilates her own image—her womensisters, herself: other women, usually seen as rivals for male attention.

The female principle, that inspiring the Black Madonna no less than the Dark Goddess, is antipathetic to the sorceress. The former is uniquely rooted in a single archetype, the latter a conspirator with even darker forces than her own.

As Rebecca Nurse or Mary Easty in 17th century New England, or Helen Taylor or Emmeline Pankhurst in 19th century Britain learned to their tragedy, a woman with a choice or opinion of her own is worse than suspect, she is subversive. Inherently fragile of body and mind, as believed for millennia, any woman not ignorant, charming and obedient must have a nefarious power source, must be able to call on powers darker than those of her nature itself to wreak vengeance. She is not even capable of being her own dark power.

The motivation for the release of this polluted power is male. This combustible crisis can be seen most dramatically in the popular historical novel genre. Two court tales, the 11th century *Tale of Genji* and the Restoration-set *Forever Amber*, are exemplars of the genre and the import. The latter, wildly successful in the mid-1940s, is an historical romance opening in 1644 and dealing with the court intrigues surrounding Charles II in England. Like *Genji*, it is set at court with a charming, womanizing ruler at the center of the action. He is considerate of his paramours, although a good deal of the plot maneuvers center on the rivalry, jealousy and revenges of these women. Court intrigues, historical detail, and psychological insights into characters close to the real abound, but it is the delineation of the vengeful siren that holds the imagination.

A single citation summarizes the core of the plots: Amber and Barbara, two of Charles' mistresses, are gossiping about his newest love interest when Charles himself appears: "The brief camaraderie was gone; the two women were once more intense rivals, each passionately determined to outdo the other" (Winsor 677). Amber St. Claire herself, historical Ur-type for the heroine of romantic fiction ever since she lived, reflects the common case succinctly: "Amber was pleased by their interest, malicious as it was, for only jealousy and envy ever got a woman such attentions from her own sex, she thought. Next to a man's admiration she valued a woman's envy" (Winsor 931).

Audre Lorde has explained :

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (295)

Lorde's constituency is women violated by male-originated pornography. In this context, she is correct in stating that "the erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, psychotic, the plasticized sensation" (296). Historically, however, the truncating of the erotic source in women from the dark-moon feminine principle itself to a corrupt power from the dark male underworld meant that the female erotic source emerged in the world as a destructive drive bodied into a vengeful spirit.

"Of course, women so empowered are dangerous" (Lorde 296), just as dangerous as a woman empowered to the point of being in Parliament, as Helen Taylor discovered in Victorian England. Erotic power is no less threatening than political. Odd, then, that the evil eroticism that calls otherworldly agents into play for envy's aims of the doom of the female rival for desire's center-stage is invoked in hunger for the attention of a political figure.

Otherworldly agents emerge as central players in *The Tale of Genji*: there are fifty-three examples of spirit possession in the novel, the greatest number in later 10th through 11th century Japanese literature. The Rokujo lady is undoubtedly the most distinguished possessing spirit in a literary tradition rich in ghosts of every type. Described as tempestuous, haughty, elegant, sensual, assertive, proud, she seems a viable person in her own right until we learn that excess characterizes her behavior. Married at 16, widowed at 20, she does seem to have been excessively tried by life's circumstances, and, indeed, found guilty. Lippitt and Selden judge that *Genji* "reveals that women writers had attained a high degree of consciousness of their predicament . . . [and so delineate] the experience of weak and socially insignificant people" (xii).

As the psychologist Juliet Mitchell emphasizes, the weakness and social insignificance of women lies historically in their social and psychological roles rather than their biological difference from men. This "gendering" of women makes them become suspect at crisis points when an important historical change occurs and they become defined as part of the old order, needing to be eradicated. In the recharting of literary territory by feminist critics, as Marianne Dekoven says in the lead article to an issue on "Gendered Modernity," the analysis of male-female conflict ("the battle of the sexes") and its importance to the history of gender in modernism [as developed by Gilbert and Gubar] "is only a further stepping stone to writing an accurate literary canon. Historical romance situates real women in fictional forms, in such changed times, thus accentuating their gender-defined roles as allies of the fear of the day—fears that arise from

a disgust with the recent past, both literary and cultural, resulting in the impulse to 'make it new,' . . . coupled with a fear of the 'new' itself: a fear of loss of privilege and power, projected as fear of chaos, anarchy, the disintegration of the self. Women, meanwhile, desired the freedom that only the 'new' could offer. Yet they were afraid of the still-ascendant patriarchal power that punished their desire, whether that power was lodged in male dominance itself or in its enforcer, female-repression. (35)

Dekoven specifically examines women's role in birthing modernism, but no matter what the historical crisis, reactions to change coalesce around women's gender roles, which in turn spin in the vortex of fear, insubstantial and otherworldly in origin.

Chinese thought, from the dawn of civilization and as introduced into Japan, was dominated by the fear of spiritual beings. Kyoko Selden outlined an example of this phenomenon of a demon's choosing a woman's form as the usual one, and instances similar to Rokujo's of a woman choosing to become a demon. "A courtier's daughter who lost her lover to another woman prays for seven days at Kibune Shrine: make me a demon so I can possess my rival to death." This woman-turned-murdering-demon is the Bridge Maiden of Uji, and the wide swath of death she deals is horrifying. "In the anonymous Noh play 'Kanawa,'" however, "the protagonist becomes a demon like her model, but her revenge does not carry through, thwarted as much by her own contradictory emotions as by the intervention of the divine powers."

In the Rokujo/Aoi possession/murder story, two different Noh play versions alter the basic interpretation of Rokujo as she-devil. *The Shrine in the Fields* is perhaps the salient example of a recounting of the Genji-Rokujo liaison from a sympathetic point of view. There is nothing about vengeful murder at all in the play, but rather a healthy rivalry between mother and daughter, not unlike that of Edith Wharton's *The Mother's Recompense*. Aoi no ue, of course, is the diametric opposite—Rokujo here commits the willful murder of her rival in love by her vengeful spirit in the form of a living ghost. This is the version closest to *The Tale of Genji* and *Forever Amber*, in which a woman's worldly resources depend on the fickle attentions she can engage from a political virtuoso—her power is uniquely erotic and no less ephemeral than his, its roots and machinations equally shrouded, its ends equivalent in evil, but its penalty dealt more harshly since its roots are believed to be in the other world, the awful spiritual one against which there is no recourse.

European thought from the dawn of our era was as well paranoid about the dark powers of the devil. Women as creatures of invisible emotion and feelings were seen as allied with the spirit world and threats to the present one. "Borderline enactments of intense emotionality" are today explained and treated by medical professionals (Young-Eisendrath and Wiedeman 3), but pre-Freud were equated with traffic in the spirit world.

Young-Eisendrath and Wiedeman explain the "paradoxical nature of female emotional power . . . stereotypically characterized as attacking the freedom of men to be independent and rational . . . pejoratively described as engulfing and overwhelming, impossible for men to understand or manage" (44). "The distress of excluded authority" (47) in the real world is perverted into an expression of power in the netherworld and metaphorically depicted as witch or living ghost. In their studies of dreams, these female psychotherapists have found that "female aggression tends to be . . . different from male aggression in terms of the images presented in dreams and fantasies. [It] is depicted as poisoning, casting magic spells, wielding small knives, stone walling, name calling, and stagnation" (115). Themes of darkness prevail, and social acting out of these dreams as well as their recounting in literary conventions use the same imagery.

Lady Rokujo's dreams bridge the physical world and the spiritual in which she is believed to draw her fearful power:

... her mind had been buffeted by such a tempest of conflicting resolutions that sometimes it seemed as though she had lost all control over her own thoughts. She remembered how one night she had suddenly, in the midst of agonizing doubts and indecisions, found that she had been dreaming. It seemed to her that she had been in a large magnificent room where lay a girl whom she knew to be Princess Aoi. Snatching her by the arm, she had dragged and mauled the prostrate figure with an outburst of brutal fury such as in her waking life would have been utterly foreign to her. Since then she had had the same dream several times. How terrible! It seemed then that it was really possible for one's spirit to leave the body and break out into emotions which the waking mind would not countenance. (162)

This dichotomy of waking and dreaming, life and death, good and evil is usually fictionally represented by a rival pair of women as the double sides of the female being. In the dramatic dyads of adversarial female fictional characters, certainly that of Rokujo/Aoi stands as companion to Scarlett/Melanie, Mieko/Yasuko (*Masks*, Fumiko Enchi), Hardy's Eustacia/Thomasin, Amber/Barbara, Bertha/Jane and so on to include a list that can be added to indefinitely by the least well-read among us. Although one male critic, Dan McLeod, has interpreted Genji and his descendants as men "all of whom persist in tormenting the women they are drawn to . . . [avatars] of the mother-and-lover sequentially re-embodied" (cited in Berry, 22), anyone familiar with the Noh interpretations of Murasaki's women characters realizes that the original fault lies differently with each assessment.

In a study of women's nurturing friendships during the nineteenth century in America, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown that where emotional segregation exists in a society, a "specifically female world" develops and that within this world "friends did not form isolated dyads but were normally part of highly integrated networks" (9, 11). While arguing the positive homosocial relationships in which women were nourished, Smith-Rosenberg demonstrates the emotional centrality women held for each other (13). She explains that in a society of separate spheres, women could become part of emotionally sustaining dyads with other women without being subjected to social condemnation. Certainly female utopian literature, with its world of the single sphere, has long presented the sort of supportive friendships between women Virginia Woolf meant when she cited, "Chloe liked Olivia." In social settings such as those at non-harem courts in the historical novel, however, women are unable to emotionally bolster one another because their rivalry for position vis-à-vis the same man defines their unique sphere.

The other world of the literary female utopia is constructed with language setting it apart from the more common fictional world reflecting the gendered real one of the two spheres. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* the vocabulary of violence is absent,

along with all but three prototypes of the human male. Selecting a core vocabulary of violence from "she-devil" novels, we list :

accursed thing/curse	hostility
brutal	jealous/jealousy
death	malice/malicious
demon/devil	possess/possession
despise	rivals/rivalry
dream/dreaming	sorcery/sorceress
envy/envious	spells
evil	unhappy/unhappiness
fury	vengeance
hate/hatred	witch

While these words apply to women and their destructiveness in the gender-emphasizing historical romance, in the feminist utopia they are either attributed to the male or rendered neuter. "Accursed thing/curse," and "unhappiness" do not appear at all. Of the other fourteen terms, "demon/devil," "envy" and "witch" appear once each in *Herland*. When the male narrator tries to explain patriarchal Christianity to the Herland woman he falls in love with, he finds that "The story of the virgin birth naturally did not astonish her, but she was greatly puzzled by the Sacrifice, and still more by the Devil, and the theory of Damnation" (110). A she-devil is beyond even imagining.

Of the motivating power of female jealousy, envy and vengeance we learn little. Near the end of the novel Ellador "was at first, for a brief moment, envious of her [newly pregnant] friend—a thought she put away from her at once and forever" (140). Earlier on, in learning of the history of Herland, Terry is incredulous at seeing sister-love: "We all know women can't organize—that they scrap like anything—are frightfully jealous.' But these New Ladies didn't have anyone to be jealous of, remember,' drawled Jeff" (58). They "had expected jealousy, and found a broad sisterly affection, a fair-minded intelligence, to which we could produce no parallel" (81). The men find "the drama of the country was—to our taste—rather flat. You see, they lacked the sex motive and, with it, jealousy" (99). Where it does exist, it is male : "Then that deep ancient chill of male jealousy of even his own progeny touched my heart," says Terry (141). Jealousy and vengeance are not feminine emotions, but attributes of the male world of "that God of Battles of ours, that Jealous God, that Vengeance-is-mine God" as Terry explains (112). The only other time "vengeance" (or "revenge" in any form) appears is when, remembering the non-violent anti-escape anesthesia, the other two men warn Terry, "If you do any mischief in this virgin land, beware of the vengeance of the Maiden Aunts!" (59)

So with the other terms : "brutal," "evil," and "malice" are qualities described by the men about the world as we know it. "Death," "dreams," "hate," "spirit," and "possession" are simply used idiomatically ("life and death dash," death compared to refreshing sleep, "heavenly dreams" "hate to admit" "hate to dwell on the unpleasant" "the spirit of the people" "possess skill and knowledge"). The horrendous motivating female emotions of the tragedies in the historical novel are innocuous in the herland of a closed feminine

sphere, whether in utopian fiction or in what Smith-Rosenberg has defined as the "specifically female world" of nineteenth century women's friendships.

Diametrically different is this plot summary: "From the first chapter of Part I to the final chapter of Part VI, [the] heroine doggedly directs her emotional energies to capturing the attention of a much-coveted male, but every such attempt propels [her] into some sort of relationship (mother, daughter, sister [rival]) with another female" (Miner 26). Is this a plot description of *Forever Amber* or of Edith Wharton's *The Mother's Recompense*, or *The Tale of Genji*? The first, but it could be of countless stories from *Genji* to *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. No matter what the female role ratio is, the rivalry for the same man drives a woman to destroy something female—not male. The ultimate destruction is herself, out of a necessity to eradicate the erotic so terrifyingly linked to the otherworldly.

The terror lies ever in the unseen. As Jean Auel in another historical romance, *The Clan of the Cave Bear*, shows, even the most obvious result of the erotic was so long misunderstood—children were believed to be born most mysteriously, from a glance; unlike political power whose routes could always be traced, erotic power resided in a world shadowed from human eyes. Mortal enemies in a battle whose parameters can be known are far lesser threats than those whose power is believed to originate in an incorporeal realm.

When Genji lies beside his new young love, Aoi, he feels nothing but tenderness for her. For the discarded Lady Rokujo, on the other hand, there are only flat memories: "How tiresome the other was, with her eternal susceptibilities, jealousies and suspicions!" (Murasaki 66). As the night wears on, though, she turns from tiresome to threatening: "Suddenly Genji saw standing over him the figure of a woman, tall and majestic: 'You who think yourself so fine, how comes it that you have brought to toy with you here this worthless common creature, picked up at random in the streets? I am astonished and displeased,' and with this she made as though to drag the lady from his side" (Murasaki 66). To Genji's horror, he finds Aoi dying. "Perhaps some accursed thing, some demon had tried to snatch her spirit away; she was so timid, so childishly helpless" (Murasaki 67).

This is almost identical with the scene near the end of *Forever Amber* when Amber has a dramatic confrontation with the pregnant wife of her former lover, and one true love, Bruce: "All the jealous hatred she had for Corinna had seized hold of her and made her something evil, dangerous, demoniacal" (957). The scorned woman's power is from the devil, not from her feminine core. These two scenes show erotically empowered women as having to have traffic with evil spirits, demons not as metaphors for uncontrollable rage, but demons as otherworldly spirits directing uniquely to destruction of a mirrored female being.

"The internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from our selves nor from others" (Lorde 296). The erotic Lorde refers to here is the original principle of love which makes possible the demand that all of life be lived in the fullness of joy. When the empowerment from within to be satisfied from within is bent to an alien shape, that of a sexuality

defined by the male choice, a grotesque meaning emerges: "This is one reason the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all" (296). That this sort of definition is a perversion is explosively signaled by the demonic possession of Amber or Rokujo by a devastating sexual jealousy. "Lady Rokujo's sufferings were now far worse than in previous years. Though she could no longer endure to be treated as Genji was treating her, yet the thought of separating from him altogether and going so far away agitated her so much that she constantly deferred her journey" (Murasaki 161).

Amber is equally tormented and yoked by rivalries known and secret with other women, notably her own mother and step-daughter. Like Rokujo she is unable to accept erotic power, accepting instead subjection to it. Rokujo's 'living spirit' (163) is a startling image for the woman who "brooded constantly upon the nature of her own feelings toward [her rival], but could discover in herself nothing but intense unhappiness. Of hostility towards Aoi she could find no trace at all. Yet she could not be sure whether somewhere in the depths of a soul consumed by anguish some spark of malice had not lurked" (165).

The secret of Amber's mother's identity which lurks at the heart of much destructiveness is a secret internalized by Amber—she wears her mother's wedding dress without knowing it, nor does she know her mother almost married the groom. So Rokujo accepts that somehow all the death and destruction must be somehow, secretly and without her conscious intention, her fault. As Natalie Schroeder states in the context of popular Victorian fiction, but which is applicable to much of the history of women's fiction, "although the struggles end in defeat, the powerful, erotic, self-assertive females live on in the pages of these and other novels of the period" (101). The misplacement of the adversary leads to the defeat of the woman protagonist, for by replacing the male contender with a female rival, the woman makes her destructive actions acceptable to her reading audience, but necessarily destroys herself at the same time.

When the self-destruction is incremental, as in Rokujo's slow descent into spirit possession and loss of both love and self-respect, or Amber's Becky-Sharp-like gradual slipping from success, it is usually shown as psychological. In Fay Weldon's novel, *The Live and Loves of a She-Devil*, however, the physical self-immolation becomes a metaphor for the emotional loss. Suburban housewife Ruth, whose husband Bobbo leaves to join the successful romantic novelist, Mary Fisher, says: "And I am fixed here and now, trapped in my body, pinned to one particular spot, hating Mary Fisher. It is all I can do. Hate obsesses and transforms me: it is my singular attribution" (3). Her response to this, shown in revolting detail in the successful film versions of the novel, is to transform herself emotionally into a successful businesswoman, and physically into a clone of Mary Fisher through excruciatingly painful surgery. Her self-hatred merges into her antipathy to Mary Fisher, and her revenge ends with the torture of her husband, yoked to a wife who has had tucks taken in her legs and looks like his now-dead mistress.

It is the self who suffers in female revenge, for female self-destruction, the asp at the breast of a Cleopatra or the adder at the foot of a Mrs. Yeobright, evokes pity, and is thus

acceptable. Female attack on and destruction of the male injurer would elicit the scorn due Philip Wylie's "generation of vipers," the breeding of acceptable retaliatory actions, and this striking out or striking back at the real antagonist has never been legitimate in the woman's sphere.

Feminist theory and feminist criticism are revisionist, not in revising female experience or history, but male perceptions of them. Correcting the focus, women critics are in the midst of the enormous project of re(right)writing the canon. Returning to historically contextual definitions, to those recognizable by women, every category must be restudied: historical, social, psychological, grammatical, biological, only to begin. Value systems must be recast in their original forms rather than received covered in the layers of traditionally misogynic views. A system must be charted where women, from Medea in Greece, to lady Rokujo in Japan, to Amber St. Claire or Ruth-wife-of-Bobbo in England/America, who have taken control of their lives and saved their children's lives even in non-tender, non-fragile, non-obedient ways, find a place in the pantheon of the proper.

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